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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 292.—Vol. XI. FOR WEEK ENDING AUGUST 4, 1894. [Price One Penny.

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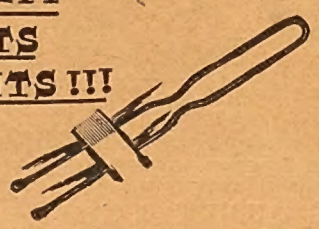

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 292.—Vol. XI. *FOR THE WEEK ENDING AUGUST 4, 1894.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

A BRIGANDS' BALL.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,—You remember, do you not, the Countess Eteinnette de Repey—the young one, of course, not the old one—my black-eyed demon? When I say "my," it is a form of speech, for she is not mine. You, he, I, we all know her. We have all sighed for her; but none of you has had the happiness that I have had, of being in the dead of night with her in her own carriage. It is true that her maid was there also; but, nevertheless, it was a great happiness. And yet I would willingly have deprived myself of it.

We were at her country house at Kerchvar. It was already very late in the evening when she suddenly remembered that there was a ball on the following night at the Casino of Arad, and that she positively promised to be there. She ordered her carriage, and as I was her only guest, she begged me to accompany her.

"My dear Baron, will you come with me?"

What could I answer?

"My dear Countess, the night is very dark, we shall be upset, we shall break some limb, and how can we dance after that? We have the three Kœras to pass, the bridge over one of them is not firm, and there is every chance of our being drowned. The forest near Szalouta is a nest of brigands. How can I defend you all alone? And then, what is the necessity of going this evening? We can start to-morrow morning after we have had our tea; your superb dapple-greys will put us down at Arad in the afternoon, and we shall have plenty of time to think about your toilet."

That is word for word what I said to her; but I spoke in vain. The more I tried to dissuade her the more firmly she held out. She did not want to drive post-haste; she wished to rest after the journey; she did not care to jump from her carriage, worn out and heated, into the ball-room. Then, too, she thought that there was nothing more beautiful than the stars, the frogs, and heaven knows what else. Her whim must be gratified, though the world should come to an end.

I could choose; I might either accompany her or remain in the château alone. I went with her, and as a compensation she granted me the favour of sitting opposite her in the carriage. The journey was a charming one. The Countess loaded me with favours. First of all she placed a muff box on my knees, to which she soon added her muff; then she burdened me with some other packages, and finally went off to sleep. It was in vain that I spoke; she did not answer. Nevertheless, she condescended to ask me a series of questions about her work-box, her satchel, her basket, and made inquiries as to whether I was not seated on her hat-box. Upon being reassured, she went off to sleep again. Her maid moaned about her headache. I, in my turn, made believe to sleep.

Suddenly a more violent jolt than any of the others woke us all up. The carriage seemed to have half upset. The Countess, who was still drowsy, asked what had happened. The footman got down from the box and came to the carriage-door.

"Excellency, we have lost our way."

"Well, what does it matter? Is that a reason for stopping? If there is a good road before us, we shall arrive in the end."

"Yes, but——"

"What do you mean by 'yes, but'? The road must surely lead somewhere."

"That is true; yet I fear it does not lead to a good place."

"You are crazy! Is there such a thing as a bad place in the world? Where are we?"

"In the Szalouta Forest."

"The forest is not interminable. You can get out of it in two hours, whether you go lengthways or breadthways."

"But the coachman fears——"

"The coachman, in his contract, did not reserve the right to fear."

"He fears an accident to your Excellency."

"That is not his affair."

"Or for the horses."

"That is no concern of his, either."

"The forest is infested with brigands, or poor boys, as they are called in Hungary."

"The coachman is a goose. Is he not a poor boy also?"

"He means the poor boys who steal horses."

I thought it proper to take part in the conversation.

"My dear Countess, there is no reason for jesting. You see, it was hardly worth while to start in order to sleep in the depths of the forest. You may have your horses stolen, or your life taken. If I, at least, only had my revolver!"

"To have that stolen, too?"

And thereupon the little demon opened the carriage door, and, before I could prevent her, alighted.

"What a magnificent night. How delicious the forest smells. How the fire-flies sparkle! Just look, Baron!"

"Look! Why you can't see three steps before you!"

"Yes, yes, you can. Don't you see a light down there among the trees?"

I turned cold! We had fallen into a den of thieves! From the top of his box the coachman answered, in a voice stifled with fear:

"My dear Baron, will you come with me?"

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Clinging in despair to my arm.

"Excellency, it is the *czarda* which keeps its guests." (Proverbial expression for saying: a tavern from which no one ever escapes.)

"If it keeps its guests, it is just what we need. Let us go there."

I was in despair.

"Countess," said I, "in the name of heaven, what do you mean to do? This is a rendezvous for robbers, where we shall all have our throats cut; a den, the landlord of which lives in constant communication with all the bandits of the country, and where they assassinate persons every night!"

The wicked creature only laughed at me. She told me that we read of such things, but they did not really exist. She added that she would go to another inn if we could find one for her, but as there was only that one she had no choice. And she ordered the coachman to follow with the carriage, declaring that she would walk on ahead and serve as our guide.

All objections and supplications were useless. We were obliged to follow her toward the inn with all our luggage, for she threatened, if we were frightened, to go alone. Truly, she was afraid of nothing.

As we came near the house our ears were suddenly struck by strains of merry music, which reached us through half open windows.

Heavens! the inn was indeed full of brigands.

"Well," said the countess, gaily, "we were going to a ball, and here we find one. We cannot escape from fate."

While she was speaking she darted toward the door. For a moment I was impelled to turn on my heel, to leave her there in the lurch and to make good my own escape. But that would not have been proper. Besides, I could never have rid myself of her maid, who was clinging in despair to my arm. The poor woman was half dead with fright, and followed her mistress with trembling steps. Through the open window we heard the noise of the dance and the frantic shouts of the men as they rushed about the room. But the Countess was not alarmed; she opened the door boldly and walked in.

The room, long and wide, was whitewashed. In the first moment of emotion I thought there must be at least fifty men in it, dancing and rushing around. Later, on counting them, I saw that there were nine, including the inn-keeper and three *tsiganes* who composed the orchestra. But the five others were quite enough. They were all tall, strong fellows. Their pipes, which were stuck through the ribbon of their hats, almost touched the main beam in the ceiling. Their shoulders were formidable. Their five rifles were placed against the wall in a corner.

We were in a pretty wasps' nest!

When the wretches saw us, they were so surprised at our audacity that they ceased dancing. The Countess said to them, with her conquering smile:

"Excuse us, my good friends, if we disturb your amusement. We have lost our way, and as we cannot continue our journey to-night, we have come here to seek refuge."

One fellow, straight as the letter I, and finely formed, broke away from the group, twisted his moustaches, took off his hat with a swaggering gesture, brought his heels together, bowed to the Countess, and told her that her appearance did not disturb him; that, on the contrary, it made him very happy; that he was master of the premises for the moment, and that his name was Joszi Feketé (a famous Hungarian brigand). He then asked the Countess who she was.

Before I could pull her by the sleeve, to caution her to conceal her name, she had already answered:

"I am the Countess Repey. I live at Kerchvar, near here.

"Oh! I have the honour of knowing you. I was acquainted with the old Count, also. He fired his double-barrelled gun at me one day, and missed me."

A charming acquaintance!

The Countess sat down on a bench, and the bandit placed himself beside her. As for me, no one asked me to sit down.

"And where are you going this way, in the middle of the night?"

I made a sign to her not to tell.

"To the ball at the Arad Casino."

Farewell our jewels!

"Then it is very fortunate that you have lost your way. Your excellencies have no need to continue your journey. It so happens that we are just giving a ball, and I hope you will accept an invitation. Our *tsiganes* are good musicians: it is the troop of Szalouta. They play splendid *czardas*. Hey, gipsy, play us an air from the 'Beautiful Woman,' and do not let your eyes wander from your violin."

The rascal did not even ask permission. As soon as the musicians had struck up the *czardas*, he threw his dolman over his shoulder, took the countess by the wrist and drew her into the middle of the room. Another bandit threw himself on Cesarine, who was frightened to death and half-fainting. Ah! she had no need to seek dancers, for she passed from hand to hand so quickly that her foot hardly ever touched the ground.

The Countess showed what she knew. She danced with as much ardour and as much fire as if she were on the waxed floor of the Arad Casino. I had never seen her more fascinating and beautiful. Up to that time the Hungarian dance had never seemed to me, at the best, anything but strange. No one before this brigand had ever made me understand what it was.

He began by dancing round his partner with a lofty mien, affecting to be very proud of her, looking at her from head to foot, over his shoulder, mingling his cries with the music. When he was weary of this diversion, he guided her to the middle of the room, and it became the lady's turn to dance round her partner. She faced him, whirling around discreetly, with a modest reserve like that of a butterfly hovering about every flower without resting on any. I can say without exaggeration that her feet did not seem to touch the ground.

The fellow, with a coquettish gesture, bent toward the Countess as if he meant to kiss her, but he stopped, stamping his foot. The enchantress threw her head back proudly, flew off the tips of her toes, and pirouetted to the very end of the room; but the two dancers never took their eyes off each other. Finally, the brigand turned away impatiently, manifesting his anger by dancing furiously before the *tsiganes;* then, suddenly wheeling round, he seized his partner and made her fly round him like a whirlwind.

Catching for her with his pocket knife the most appetising morsels.

In the midst of the intoxication of this dance I was uneasy about one thing, and that was lest the wild fellow in his fervour should make some unseemly demonstration toward the Countess. As you may well believe, the temptation was strong.

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She was entirely in his power, and for a man on whose head a price had long been set, one crime more or less was of small account. At the first impropriety I was resolved to seize one of the guns in the corner and blow out his brains. On my honour, I was firmly resolved to do it.

Happily there was no need of going so far. The dance ended peacefully with the three traditional turns, and the chief of the brigands led his partner to her seat after having kissed her hand very respectfully. He then stepped up to me, and slapping me very insolently on the shoulder, said:

"And you, my little old chap, don't you dance?"

Just think of his calling me his little old chap!

"Thanks, I do not know how to dance."

"All right," said he, and returned to the Countess.

"You must excuse us, Excellency. We were not prepared to receive such illustrious guests. Pray accept heartily of what we can offer you. It is little, but it is good."

He alluded to the supper.

The banquet was exceptional. I can well describe it as such. The brigands placed a large dish full of stewed veal upon the long table. There was no sign of a plate. They ate with their fingers, holding in one hand a piece of bread, and fishing out with the other a slice of meat from the tureen on the point of a knife.

The Countess ate as though she had been fasting for three days. The brigand chief devoted himself to catching for her with his pocket-knife the most appetising morsels, all of which were floating about in a gravy of red pepper, and placing them on her bread. She declared that the dish was savoury.

The bandit presumed to remark that I did not eat.

"Eat, little old chap; this dish will fatten you. It is stolen goods!"

Just as I had expected.

"I thank you," I replied, "I could not eat; it is too peppery for me."

"All right," said he, and once more left me alone.

There was no use of even thinking of a glass; the wine was served in wooden cans. According to the customs of the peasantry, Joszi Feketé drank first, and, after having wiped his mouth on the loose sleeve of his shirt, presented the can to the Countess. She drank. Oh, my friends, what an extraordinary woman!

The vagabond then turned toward me and offered me a drink.

"Drink, little old chap" (always the same epithet), "or really you will fall asleep."

"Thank you, I cannot drink. I am following a homœopathic treatment."

"Oh, oh!" cried he, laughing. "I, too, am following that treatment, and, as wine made me ill yesterday, I am curing myself with wine to-day."

I was perfectly convinced that once drunk they would fall on us. The five emptied a cask among them, and yet, when they rose from the table, not one of them staggered.

While the others were giving supper to the musicians, their chief came to me again.

"My little old chap, you do not eat, you do not drink, you do not dance. How do you amuse yourself? Are you fond of cards?" And at the same time he drew a pack from his pocket.

"Ah!" thought I, "Now he wants to know how much money I have with me."

"I don't understand any game of cards," I replied.

"I will teach you one in a moment. It is very easy. See! I place one card here, another there; you cover one, I the other, and the first of us who draws a court-card wins."

He went on explaining to me from point to point a kind of lansquenet, as if I had not lost two estates at that game! I was obliged, however, to relearn it from him. What could I do? Sit down and play with him. I had in my pocket a certain amount of copper coin, which I decided to risk, and which I spread out on the table.

"What's that? You do not intend to play with coppers here?"

And he took from his pocket a handful of Austrian zweizigers and ducats. I also had some zweizigers in my pocket. I placed one of them, tremblingly, on a card. It was a court card, and I won. The thief paid. For nothing in the world would I have dared to pocket that money, so I left it on the table. I won twice, thrice, and each time I left my winnings on the table. The fourth, fifth, sixth time it was still I whom Fortune favoured. I began to feel excessively warm. My position was dreadful: playing cards with a brigand and winning his money steadily. The seventh time I won again. I had a whole string of sweizigers spread out before me. The cold perspiration ran down my brow. Why had I not the same luck at Pozoni during the sitting of the Diet? I continued to leave my winnings upon the table, while I silently murmured: "Heaven grant that I may lose this money!"

Vain prayer; for the eighth time I won again. This time I certainly thought I was marked for death. The wretch said to me, laughingly: "You are probably one of the Countess's unhappy lovers, for you win outrageously, my little old chap."

He dared to laugh at me! At the ninth turn I was trembling in every limb. I won again. The robber struck a fierce blow on the table, and still laughing, said:

"Listen, little old chap; if you go on at this rate, I shall lose a province in an hour."

He gathered up what remained of his money on the table, and rose. I offered to return him the sum that I had won, but he eyed me from head to foot with the haughtiness of a hidalgo.

"For what do you take me? Put up that money, or I will pitch you out of doors with your zweizigers."

Then I took the whole lot and threw it to the *tsiganes*.

It was only when it was too late that I understood that I had just committed a foolish act; for I had myself declared my own wealth.

The *tsiganes* surrounded me, begging me to let them play the tune I liked the best. I got rid of them by sending them to the Countess. The madcap soon made her choice. With her siren's voice she began the popular air:

"My home is in the desert
In winter and in summer."

She sang so well, and with such irresistible charm that I fancied myself in my box at the Pesth Casino, and set to work to applaud her. The brigand applauded also, and was kind enough, in his turn, to regale us with a tune. He drew out a flute and played some rustic melody. What it was I do not remember.

"It is your time, my little old chap. Sing us something."

This demand embarrassed me. How could I sing when I was in a state of mortal anguish?

"I do not know how to sing," I replied.

Generally the Countess laughed at me if I happened unconsciously to hum a few bars from some opera, in my frightful peacock voice. But this time, speaking to me in French, she begged me to sing, if I did not wish, by my refusal, to expose us all to some insult.

This request was all that was wanting to deprive me of the remainder of my confidence. What could I do? With trembling heart and choking voice I began to sing laboriously. For a moment the Countess listened to me with great composure, but in attacking the verse—

"With thee alone I can be happy,"

I made an effort to raise my voice, when it broke so ludicrously that she burst out laughing. The whole band followed suit; so much so that at the end I did as the others, although I had not the slightest wish to imitate them.

The dance began again. The Countess was indefatigable. She whirled about until daylight. When the sun smote the window-panes she thanked the brigand for the pleasure he had given her, and begged him to have her carriage prepared, so that she might continue her journey.

Now, surely, our last hour had come!

Joszi Feketé went out, woke up the coachman and the footman, had the horses harnessed, and came back to tell us that everything was ready. Then I felt sure that he intended to assassinate us on the road.

I got back into the carriage with more fear than I had got out of it. The most suspicious thing to me was that I had not been asked for my pocket-book.

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The bandit chief mounted his horse and accompanied us as far as the high road, keeping always by the carriage door. On arriving there he showed us our way, took off his hat, wished us much pleasure, and disappeared.

I did not feel safe until we had reached Zernid. Then only I reproached the Countess and told her that, if my presence had not restrained the rascals, this adventure might have had the most frightful ending for her.

She listened to my observations patiently, and by way of reply asked

"*Apropos*, dear Baron, are you not sleepy?"

"No," I answered curtly.

"Then sing me the end of that tune that you could not finish last night."

"In that case I am sleepy."

All along the road I made myself happy by dreaming of the favours that the Countess would have to lavish on me to buy my silence about this escapade. However, we had scarcely arrived at Arad and she had not yet crossed the passage-way from the hotel door to her room before she had already related the whole story to three persons. When we entered the ballroom, everyone knew of it.

He was such a good dancer.

That did not prevent her from being the queen of the ball, as she had counted on being, or else why should she have come, seeing that she did not dance once? To those who invited her she replied that she was tired. I should think so! She had danced eighteen *czardas* from midnight to morning. I, who had not moved, could scarcely keep on my legs.

I rushed to the gaming-rooms, saying to myself: "Now that Fortune has come to you, press her to your heart." At one table they were playing lansquenet.

"Away with you!" I cried. "I have a wonderful run of luck to-day at this game!' Yes, I was in for a thousand florins. Fortune only pursues me when she sees that she terrifies me.

Six months later, I took up a newspaper one day and read in it that the famous brigand Joszi Feketé, condemned to death by a court-martial, had been executed.

I carried this interesting paper to the Countess and showed her the news.

"Ah!" she said, resting the paper in her lap, when she had finished reading the account, "he was such a good dancer!"

A STORY ON A TABLE CLOTH.

It was rather dark in the hall-way when Julian Jones went upstairs to his new quarters on the fourth floor.

Someone else was on the stairs. He discerned a woman's form in the niche near the second floor, and the glimmering of a hand holding back skirts for him to pass. There was a faint breath of exquisite perfume about her.

"Excuse me," he said. Just then the light flared out in the lower hall. He made out a soft, oval face and a dainty figure as he passed. Julian was a big fellow, with features of strength rather than of beauty, but for all that he was a "sensitive," whose impressions of people were as sure as a dog's instinct about his master. The young woman's "atmosphere" was agreeable. It followed him to his room.

He lighted the gas and looked round. It was a goodish den for a literary worker. The carpet of pale greens and olives was almost new. The windows had lace curtains, and a fair out-look.

He sat down and tilted back his chair. A curious plot for a story had come into his mind. It seemed to start out of that chance encounter on the stairs, yet he scarcely realised it then, so subtle is the action of the brain.

His heart began to beat quickly. He had done a good deal of patient work in the past, with indifferent success; but such impromptu mental activity was new. He took it as a good omen. He had a strain of what we call superstition in his nature. A strange dream had impressed him with the belief that with his change of quarters something was to happen—for the better.

The bright, unique ideas came pouring into his mind like a flood. They clamoured for expression. He found a pencil in his pocket, and looked round for paper. He had not a scrap. His trunks would not come till the morning. If he stirred from the room to hunt up a stationer, the aroma of the story would be sure to escape. He thought desperately of his cuffs, his shirt-front, and execrated the motley wall paper. Had it been plain it should have done duty as a tablet.

He sprang from his chair. The covering of the square table in the corner was of white oil-cloth—imitation "marble." He sat down and marked it off in spaces. The pencil glided over it smoothly.

He wrote quickly and without effort. He knew he had never done anything like this before. Some one seemed to be dictating at his elbow. He had heard and read of such cases. Now he was the subject.

He wrote column after column, till the cloth was covered. He leaned back and surveyed it. He knew the thing was unique and exquisitely wrought out. It was a love story, with that dainty creature on the dim stairway flitting through it. Julian's eyes grew misty. He looked at his watch. The three hours he had been writing seemed but five minutes.

It was early yet, not eleven o'clock. He locked the door, and went out into the street. He had a vague idea of getting paper from some hotel clerk. He could not feel easy until his story was in manuscript.

He turned into the street. The thunder of the traffic was in his ears. A cab was dashing recklessly along. The subtle fascination of the story was yet upon him. In the midst of it he was conscious of a sudden shock, a pain crossing the sweetness, making horrible discord, then all became blank.

He was pulled from under the feet of the horse. The blood flowed from a wound made by the hoof.

No address could be found on him and he was carried to a hospital. He had been severely but not fatally injured.

Brain fever set in, but an excellent constitution was in his favour. In his seasons of delirium the marble table-cloth haunted him. Sometimes it hung over him like an awning, with the letters like a thousand eyes staring at him. Then they changed into Chinese hieroglyphics, and the young woman on the stairs was wrinkling her lovely brow in vain endeavours to decipher them. Again the cloth was waving like a banner from the roof of the *Daily Fizzler*.

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Through careful nursing he came out of the tangle at length, and began to recall just what had happened. His story, which was to have inaugurated a new era, what had become of it? Four weeks he had been lying there, they told him.

In that time the room would be let to a new tenant, and his story scrubbed off the cloth by some wooden-headed chambermaid. He fretted and fumed over it. His omen of good luck had been demolished by a sledge hammer.

"Don't you want to look over these papers?" queried the pretty, cheerful nurse, placing a pile before him. "You need to catch up with the times that have rolled on while you lay here."

Julian tossed them over half savagely, and came presently upon something that made his heart thump. His story was looking him in the face from the columns of the *Exaggerator*. It was entitled, "Into His Kingdom." The letters seemed to wink and blink at him knowingly.

He read it through. There had been scarcely any alteration. Somebody had got ahead of the chambermaid and copied it, selling it as his or her own production. He should never be able to prove its authorship. He groaned in spirit.

Presently he came upon a copy of the *Daily Fizzler*, three weeks old. There he found the story, headed by a sensational paragraph, which was evidently its first appearance, the other paper being a copy.

Julian was half amused, half annoyed over the conjectures about the author. The paragraph set forth the production found on the oil-cloth as the last effort of an unfortunate son of genius. Driven to extremity, without a penny even to buy paper, he had fixed his last ideas upon the only white surface he could command, and then he had gone out into the night and committed suicide. Could he have staved off despair twenty-four hours longer the ice would have been broken.

Julian breathed more freely. The copyist, then, had not palmed off the production as his or her own. He could yet claim it without dispute.

As soon as he was on his feet, he called on the editor of the *Daily Fizzler*, who knew him by sight, and had prophesied success for him some day.

"It seems I have been figuring in the *Fizzler* lately as an impecunious suicide," said Julian bluntly.

The editor laid down his pen.

"Explain," he said.

Julian told the story.

"Like another man, you awake to find yourself famous," said the editor, offering him his hand. "That story has been copied all over the country. It is a gem of its kind."

"I'm not so sure that I shall ever do so well again," said Julian.

"What is done once can be done again. You will now command a hearing."

"How did you get hold of it?"

"It was sent in by —— by ——" consulting a memorandum—"by Miss Cora Wheeler, 142, —— Street."

"Why, I wrote the story in that house!"

"She sent a note stating the facts, and Bolton—you know him—touched them up a trifle. None of us suspected you. The landlady believed your name was Jones, but, on second thoughts, she confessed it might be Smith."

"I only had a word with her when I engaged the room."

"I may as well pay you to-day," said the editor as he made out a cheque.

A glance showed Julian it was drawn for £20. He was in luck after all, it seemed.

Then he drove in a cab to Charing Cross Road and rang the bell at 142, —— Street. How much had happened since he first went up those steps, less than six weeks ago!

The girl who opened the door looked at him blankly when he asked for Miss Wheeler, and showed him into a small reception room while she took his card.

He was presently asked to step upstairs to the third floor.

The door was half-open, showing a prettily furnished interior. He tapped gently. There was a rustling behind a dark green portiere, and a young woman stepped out from behind it, and greeted him with "Good morning." She was the one he had met on the stairs in the gloom, he could swear.

"You are Miss Cora Wheeler?"

She bowed.

"And I am Julian Jones. I wrote the story on the oilcloth. I am told it found its way into print through you. I have come to thank you."

Miss Wheeler was as breathless as Julian. She motioned him to a chair and sat down. The facts he had presented rapidly grouped themselves at once logically in her mind.

"Then you did not commit suicide," she said with a mirthful glance at his muscular frame, adding, "I never thought you did."

"I suppose I came pretty near 'shuffling off,'" he said, and he repeated his story.

"I expected something of the sort had happened," said Miss Wheeler, "though there were all sorts of conjectures. The landlady called me up to read what you had written. She thought it might denote, denote——"

"Insanity."

"It enchanted me. I write a little myself, you see. I sent it to the *Fizzler*. It was copied everywhere. You are a genius."

"With the right sort of inspiration," corrected Julian

It looks now as if the pair would go into partnership.

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A BROKEN IDYLL.

FROM the rocky shore of St. Catherine, in the island of Jersey, one can see perfectly, when it is fine, the coast of France. It is even possible to distinguish the steeples of churches, the forms of houses, and to hear the soft, far-off echo of a chiming bell. From the little Channel island many a young boy and girl has gazed out over the sea to the land of fashion and greatness, and perchance sighed like the young eagle chained to the rock who longs to burst his bonds and soar away.

But none had ever looked thither with a fiercer longing than the boy who sat perched on the stone wall near the lighthouse one still summer night.

He was not alone.

By his side knelt a little girl who held her hat in her hand, and let what air there was play gently with her curls. She could not have been more than ten years of age; but even at that early period of existence the spirit of coquetry was rife in her. It was manifest by the way in which she crept gradually closer to the boy's side, and slid her head upon his shoulder to look up at him with the most appealing of blue eyes.

The lad was sunburnt and somewhat freckled, tall and sturdy, with a keen, dark eye, and close-cut hair. He looked about fifteen.

"To think that over there is the great world—Paris, which is more beautiful than London, and full of picture galleries, magnificent buildings, and great theatres! Here on the island we do not know what it is to live; there are only the cattle and the farm, the picnics and tourists in summer, and the terrible long winter. There is never anything new but the faces of the visitors, and they are often rude and noisy. If my parents think to see me live and die upon the little farm yonder, they are greatly mistaken. No, I must see the world—live in the world!"

There was rebellion in the face and tone of the lad as he spoke the words. His companion laid her cheek caressingly against his rough, brown face.

"Poor Louis!" she whispered. "Where will you go? If you go to Paris I am afraid you will not come back; and grandmother says that it is only rich people who should live in Paris."

The lad's cheek flushed.

"Rich people!" he repeated bitterly. "Listen, Marie; one may not always be poor. There are things which bring money—for instance, if one can paint pictures, write books, or play in big theatres, one is no longer unknown and poor."

The child looked suddenly at him with eyes full of a dawning intelligence, and slowly nodded.

"Yes, you are very clever," she said. "No one at the College in St. Heliers declaimed more beautifully. Oh, how proud I was when they applauded you at the prize-giving! But I would rather you did not go away, because grandmother is so old and cross, and no one is good to me but you."

"Poor child," he murmured, stroking her curls. "But you must be brave and good. Listen, Marie: it is for your own sake, as much as my own, that I must go away. You will not forget me, dearest, and I shall come back to find you a beautiful woman. Then it will not be the little white farmhouse with the green shutters that I shall take you home to, but a fine house in a great city which I shall have won for you."

"I had rather it were the farmhouse if you did not have to go away," she sobbed clinging to him. "For I am so lonely, and grandmother is so hard to please."

Then he talked to her gently, telling her all the dreams of a hopeful and ambitious youth; and as she listened the vision of wealth and greatness took hold of her—she being an imaginative child—and the life of the island seemed poor and mean in comparison.

They were both of French parents, but had been bred on the island. The girl was an orphan, and lived alone with her grandmother, a terrible old shrew, rapidly going blind. The lad's parents took pity on her, and had her often at the farm, but she cared little for them, they being rough, simple folk. She only loved with the ardour of her childish nature the tall, headstrong lad, who was the despair of both father and mother.

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It was just another such night ten years later. The gate of the little farmhouse at St. Catherine's was swung open, and a young man, pale and travel-stained, came slowly up the path to the porch where monsieur and madame awaited him. In another moment madame's arms were round his neck, and she was crying on his shoulder.

"Poor boy!" she ejaculated, "so you have come home after all?"

The young man cast a searching glance round, then clutched madame almost fiercely by the arm.

"Where is she?" he demanded sternly. "I do not see her!"

Madame's fat, red face paled, and she looked confused.

"Ah! how shall I tell him?" she murmured, wringing her hands.

"Speak—if you love me, speak!" her son reiterated passionately. "It is not possible that she is dead?"

He uttered the last words in a low, hushed tone, as if it were a thought almost too terrible to be spoken aloud, and clutched at the porch with a momentary overpowering faintness.

"Do not think of her, my son," madame replied vehemently. "After all our goodness in taking her in after the grandmother's death, too, it is infamous! The little wretch! She has left us!"

"When? Where? Have no steps been taken to find her?"

There was a sharp ring of pain in the words which smote madame's ear.

"It is useless," she said, laying her hand gently on her son's arm. "She did not go alone. There has been a tourist sketching about here all the summer. We have found that they took passage together on Sunday night from St. Heliers to Southampton. The whole affair had evidently been prearranged."

Her son clutched wildly at the porch for support, and passed his hand over his eyes.

"Why do you mock me?" he cried. "Tell me it is all a jest—but it is a cruel one. Ah, mother mine, surely you would not deceive me? Tell me that I have been dreaming! But I am not dreaming now—oh, no, not now. Do not keep her from me; it is such a long time since I saw her. And I—I love her so! Do not torture me. I cannot bear it."

"Would I deceive my dear son?" murmured madame, sobbing, and seeking to draw him within doors.

In the parlour he sank into a chair and seemed dead to all around him.

Once only he roused himself. His eye fell on a sprig of purple heather which lay in a tiny coral basket on the mantleshelf.

It was her's. He remembered it well—remembered the day when he had bought and given it to her, the Sabbath evening when that very sprig of heather had been gathered and put there.

He lifted his hand suddenly and dashed them to the ground. His mother glanced round nervously at the crash, and saw him treading the heather under foot. One word escaped his lips:

"Broken!" he muttered, as if in answer to an interrogation.

And in his pocket lay a letter, which now he scarcely remembered in the pain of the moment, and of which he had as yet breathed no word. But it was the reward of nearly ten years' hard fight with an adverse world, that had very nearly beaten him once or twice, and now seemed disposed to smile upon him after blighting his happiness for ever. It was an engagement at the Théâtre Francais, at a salary which, though not munificent, would have made both monsieur and madame open their eyes.

But the dream of youth had ended—the fond illusion with which he had buoyed himself to fight and win; it could only return as an agony of remembrance.

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Another ten years later, and a summer evening at St. Catherine's. A man walked swiftly towards the lighthouse, with bent head, as if full of thought. He was barely thirty-five, yet might have passed for over forty, so hardly had time and labour dealt with him. There was also about his face a stern cynicism, which made the great world who had chosen to make him what he was fear as well as praise him.

Suddenly he started. On the wall overlooking the sea sat a woman, so richly dressed and striking in appearance that one might well wonder what had brought her there.

She turned her head, and their eyes met. A hot flush swept over his face, and he bit his lip hard, as if to control some emotion. She, on the contrary, remained quite pale and perfectly composed.

"How do you do?" she said, extending her hand. "I see the recognition is mutual. I thought you were too great a personage to have time or inclination to visit St. Catherine's now."

He did not offer to take her hand; indeed, it seemed as if he had not seen it.

"And you—what brought you here?"

The query was somewhat stern.

"I? Oh, I am staying at St. Heliers," she answered carelessly—"with my husband," she added, with just a shade of triumph in her tone. "I am married now; and I had a fancy to see the old place once again, so I got him to put me down here, and he is going to call for me in about an hour's time. I do not know how long I have been here, or where he has driven to. But he can't be much longer."

"Are you happy?"

There was a rude abruptness in the words that startled her.

She turned away and laughed.

"As happy as most women. I have plenty of money, and a husband who lets me do pretty much as I please. I am quite a fashionable beauty, and the men rave about me. You may be interested to hear that, in the event of my husband's losing any more money on the Stock Exchange, I am seriously thinking of going on the stage. A good many people have advised me to do it. What do you think?"

He did not know whether she was jesting or not.

"Art has always been too dear and sacred a subject with me to be even thought or spoken of lightly," he answered coldly. "It is my life, my soul, the mistress of my existence who has never played me false," he added a little bitterly. "With the stage beauty I have nothing to do."

He was turning away, when she stopped him with an appealing gesture.

"Listen, Louis," she said; "do not condemn me utterly. If you had never wanted to be great, you would have grown up on the farm yonder, and I should have married you. We should have been happy after the fashion of simple people. It may not be in me to love much, but I loved you—I have never loved anyone else."

He looked at her swiftly.

"Yes, you ran away!"

There was a scornful incredulity in the words.

"Listen," she said imperiously. "Yes, I ran away because life was intolerable to me at St. Catherine's. I was young and"—she hesitated—"beautiful, I suppose—at least the stranger told me so; and I, like yourself, was ambitious. After all you had said to me, I could not live the little life of the farm. And you might never become great or rich, or come back to me, I thought, and so I took the Fates into my own hands and went. We cannot see the future."

"Have you never regretted it?"

"In a way, yes; but we must accept the inevitable. I have married a fashionable artist and a rich gentleman; he adores me, and I"—she shrugged her shoulders—"I tolerate him. If I had children I might have loved them, but I have none. I am quite alone, and there is only the memory of the past to remind me that I ever had a heart."

The unconscious pathos of her words touched him. He pitied her, the woman who was without his great consoler, Art. It is not given to all to enter its inner chamber and taste the rapture of that mystic union. Art is a chary lover, admitting only the true and tried. Many woo and long, in truth; few enjoy.

"Before we met," he said slowly, looking at her with a strange longing, thinking for a moment that the blue eyes of the child-sweetheart gazed into his once more, "I had often hard and bitter thoughts of you. Perhaps I hardly comprehend how fatal a tempter is beauty, or how cruel poverty to an ambitious girl. It was too much that I expected of you, for women are not like men, who work and move in the world; their province is to sit at home and wait. Some women might have done so—a duller, plainer woman, who loved more and thought less, probably would; you could not. But you have done a cruel thing—you have destroyed my faith in woman, you have broken my heart.

"As I have loved and thought of you, it is not possible for me to love and think of any other woman while I live. All the love that there is in me to give has passed away. When Destiny shut the gates of that home I might have had, it opened to me the temple of Fame in recompense, and, for the voices of the children who might have called me father, substituted the shouts of the multitude.

"My wife is a goddess whom I worship reverently and sincerely; but at times"—he shivered as he spoke; perhaps it was the breath of the sea which at that moment blew chill upon him—"the clasp of her arms is somewhat cold, and instead of the incense of her temple, one longs for the warm touch of living lips and the soft arms of animate flesh. It is but a weakness of mortals. But I see someone coming—doubtless it is your husband. Good-bye. Do not quite forget one who has so loved you. The bitterness, the regret are useless now. I have but one wish for you, that Heaven may grant you happiness, if it be possible."

She held out both hands to him.

He raised his hat and turned away.

"Think that I am your little sweetheart once again!" she cried, the tears of genuine feeling shining in her blue eyes; forget what I am and you are now, and all that has come between us. Kiss me once as you used to kiss me long ago; call me *chérie* and *bien-aimée*, and let me remember our last meeting till I die!"

It seemed as if she had suddenly cast from her the artificiality which her life had made habitual to her, and was again for a brief moment the little clinging child.

At that moment the sound of a far-off bell from the French coast fell on their ears. It was the knell of their early dream which, like the soft mist lying and spreading over the sea, had gradually faded to return no more.

For a moment he hesitated. Then his face softened, and he took her in his arms and held her to him, calling her fondly all the old pet names she had been used to hear from his lips.

But he kissed her not as the lover had done, but rather as one would kiss a dead child that had been greatly loved in life.

As he turned his steps landwards, he met at a turning of the wall the stranger he had seen approaching from afar, and looked at him curiously. Instinct told him this was Marie's husband.

The stranger returned the gaze carelessly, and threw away a half-finished cigar. He was a big man, somewhat florid in complexion, with curling hair and sleepy blue eyes, and looked as if he were well satisfied with himself and the world in general. He also looked as if he fared sumptuously every day and it did not always agree with him. But withal he is a good husband as husbands go, Louis said to himself, watching him give his arm to his wife and place a shawl round her shoulders.

"A bit chilly, isn't it?" he was saying. "I can't think what possessed you to come here. You had much better have gone on with me."

"I had a fancy to come," Marie answered somewhat wearily. "It is a beautiful place after all. You used to think so once," she added, looking at him a little wistfully.

Her husband laughed.

"We all think something beautiful once or twice in our lives," he said lightly, "and discover that it is but commonplace after all. No, my dear; it was not St. Catherine's I admired, which is a slow place; not even so picturesque as other parts of the island. It was the belle of St. Catherine's,

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and it is many years since she put St. Catherine behind her Indeed, I thought you had almost forgotten the place, until you expressed a wish to spend a week or two at St. Heliers this summer. By-the-bye, what has become of that old farmer and his wife with whom you used to live? Are they still alive, I wonder? Surly old fellow; and madame's tongue was rather sharp at times—eh, my dear?"

He laid his hand caressingly on his wife's shoulder for a moment. She shivered and imperceptibly drew away.

"Do not speak of them; they were stupid people," she said almost irritably. "I do not wish to see either of them again."

"Nor any of the people belonging to your old life?" he queried carelessly. "It could not have been a very happy life, and you seemed glad enough to leave it. When we have altered our circumstances for the better, we do not care about remembering that we have not always been as we are now. No, there could have been nothing to regret in leaving St. Catherine's."

She cast a momentary glance backwards at the sea, and longed with all the intensity of which she was capable that it were possible for her to be a child once more, and live her life again. Yet she was a woman that her world envied, and she knew it. Suddenly, she remembered that Louis had wished her happiness, and smiled a little bitterly.

As he passed through the wicket-gate and entered the farmhouse, Louis saw monsieur and madame rise to meet him. They were old now, and time and labour had bowed their once upright forms and whitened their hair. And though no word was uttered, he knew that it was the daily sorrow of the old man's life that his son would not succeed to the farm after him.

"My son," said madame, as he took the chair into which, strangely enough, he had fallen on that memorable night ten years ago, "is it not time that you thought of taking a wife? Consider, you are now a great man, and can choose among whom you will. We are old, your father and I, and there is none to come after us but you. We would wish to see our grandchildren before we die."

"Do not speak to me of marriage," her son replied wearily; "never speak to me of that again, if you love me, my mother; it is impossible."

Then he shaded his eyes with his hand, and, looking through the casement window into the garden, saw a picture of what might have been. It was himself, brown, sturdy, and marked with the labour of the soil, returning from his daily toil, and Marie, beautiful as he had seen her that evening by the sea, stood at the gate to meet him, clad in the simple dress of the peasant farmer's wife. And as he approached, brown, sturdy children rushed to greet him. He felt the clinging of their chubby arms round his neck, their soft cheeks pressed against his.

A strange choking rose in his throat. He turned his head hastily away, and his eye fell upon that vacant space on the mantel-shelf left empty by the basket and heather he had dashed from it ten years ago. It came to him that even as that was empty, so must the place of wife and children remain for him all his life.

. . . . . .

"Hullo, Marie, where are you? I must have fallen asleep; and see, it is quite dark. We must hasten home, or grandmother will scold you. I have dreamt such strange things."

The lad stretched himself and rubbed his eyes as he spoke. The little girl looked up at him wonderingly.

"You have slept a long time," she said, in rather a frightened voice. "I tried to wake you once or twice, but I could not. And every now and then you gave such a start, and cried out as if you had been hurt, but I could not hear what you said. Did you have a very bad dream, Louis? Tell me all about it."

"No, not a bad dream," he answered thoughtfully; "on the contrary, a very good one. But I cannot tell you now, little one; some day when you do not ask me I will tell you."

She looked disappointed.

"But"—he threw his arm round her as he spoke, and looked steadily into her eyes—"I shall not go away and leave you alone with grandmother, my dear; you need never be afraid of that any more. And our home shall be the farmhouse yonder, as you wished."

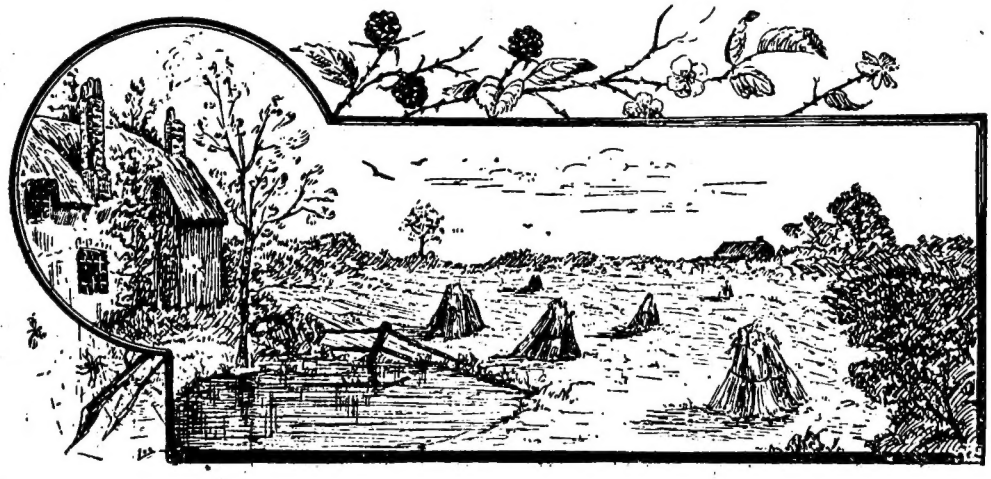
"And you will not go to Paris, after all?"

"No, dear; perhaps grandmother is right, and only rich people should go there. I will be content where Heaven has placed me."

"But the dream, Louis—the dream?"

He did not tell her that dream till years after, when she was his wife and the mother of his children—when she had almost forgotten that summer evening.

But *he* never forgot.



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THE SWIMMING-MASTER.

AT Milan, not long ago, lived two families, who shall be known in these pages as T. and C. They entertained the same feeling toward each other that the Capulets and Montagues did for one another, some centuries back. Now, as then, there was a daughter of the house of C., and, on the other side, a fine youth to carry down the name of T. Of course, these young people followed in the steps of their prototypes, and loved each other with a truly Romeo-and-Juliet ardour.

The family feud did not in any way affect the young lady and her swain, unless, indeed, to augment their fervour. They loved each other. How often at the Biffi concerts an interchange of glances had conveyed this information from one to the other; and at the races too, where they frequently met, they had managed to tell each other that henceforth they lived for one another only. It is as difficult to conceal love as it is a cough; hence, almost before they realised it, their secret was known to all their acquaintances, and, incidently, to their parents. It seemed for a time as if the world must come to an end. Then Monsieur C., of the cathedral, a friend to both of these illustrious families, tried to throw oil on the troubled waters. He did not succeed.

In vain the young pair threw themselves, in orthodox fashion, at the feet of their parents, to implore the not unusual pardon, and obtain at the same time the consent to their marriage, which, as they were both minors, the law compelled them to obtain. The old people were inexorable, absolutely unyielding. Meanwhile, June, with all its summer warmth, arrived. No better excuse was needed now for the ascendants to separate, so to speak, the descendants. The lover apparently submitted to his fate with resignation, for he got his traps together, and started over the St. Gothard for Switzerland, as he was ordered to do. The fair one, in her turn, followed her mamma, now very much on the alert, to the seaside.

All Milan was excited at this tame ending of the affair, and exclaimed in chorus: "Well, well! and only a little while ago they were so wrapped up in each other that it seemed as if they could not exist apart, and now, just see with what indifference they have accepted the situation! Serious love is, indeed, out of fashion, something to read about, maybe; but not to live up to, in this day—oh, no!"

The next scene found mother and daughter by the sea, at a fashionable resort, where, needless to add, they were the most brilliant stars in its bright firmament. The heroine of this little tale already seemed to have passed from the joy of love to that of the sea; a not unnatural transition, perhaps, for is there not a relationship between the two, since the mother of Love is the daughter of the Sea?

The soft roses of beauty returned to her fresh young cheeks, and she appeared no longer to even remember her absent lover. Indeed, she had apparently quite changed her purpose, and, instead of the school of matrimony, had undoubtedly dedicated herself to that of swimming. The lovely Milanese seemed now only bent on rivalling the graces of the ancient naiads.

The clever mother, meanwhile, looked on approvingly, thinking: "These gymnastics will drive all the nonsense out of her head, and, anyway, I should much prefer to see Ida a good swimmer than the daughter-in-law of that disagreeable old Count T., who has neither my ambition nor my quarterings."

Consequently, the marchioness put the young lady under the special care of the old swimming teacher, the white-bearded Andrea. But, curiously enough, Ida did not learn to swim, notwithstanding her frequent exercise in this art. As long as she kept near the shore she got on very well, but once out a little way she would sink, and the chances are that, if old Andrea had not stayed close by all the time, she would have made acquaintance with the bottom of the Mediterranean at the beginning of the season.

One day the marchioness sat near the shore, under a leafy acacia. The young marchioness, altogether adorable in her abbreviated bathing-costume, was swimming about with unusual audacity, and Papa Andrea, his white beard floating on the surface, held her up with one arm. A wave half-lifted her from the water—a second turned her completely round—a third passed over her—a fourth buried her from sight. Beside herself with terror, the mother gave a scream which brought half the bathing colony to her side in an instant, while she cried out: "My daughter is drowning! My life, all that I possess, to any one who will save her! Help, help!"

Before she had finished speaking, Andrea had dived under the water; the old man seemed in an instant to have recovered his strength. With their hearts in their mouths, those on shore stood perfectly still; not a sound was heard, save the distracting sobs of this modern Niobe, and the infinite echo of the sonorous ocean. Four hundred eyes were fixed in one direction, at the point where first the young girl, and then the swimming-master, had disappeared into a watery abyss.

Another moment of suspense, and then the submerged pair rose to the surface again. They were clasped in an almost frantic embrace. Evidently they were breasting the waves with the superhuman strength of two people brought back from the very gates of death. Andrea held the white-faced girl tightly about the waist, while with his free arm he struck out for shore.

A shout of joy greeted them, turning suddenly into one of indescribable surprise, however, as they came nearer land. When they were a few rods only from the beach, the surprise there became mute astonishment. Andrea, the old man, had undergone a wonderful metamorphosis. The waves of the blue Mediterranean had sprinkled his face with the sweet waters of eternal youth. In fact, one wave had carried away his white beard, and a second his wig; his hair was now black and curly. This old man, unexpectedly grown young, was holding the pretty young marchioness closely, almost desperately, to his heart—a clasp, in short, which bespoke the lover rather than the life-preserver.

They reached the shore. The summer colony understood at a glance, then, how and why old Andrea had become young Count T., and a salvo of applause echoed in every heart, even by the staunchest upholders of implacable escutcheons, greeted him.

Two hours later—the young marchioness having meanwhile completely recovered from the shock—a conversation between the Marchioness C. and young Count T. was drawing to a close something after this fashion:

"I do not wish to judge your conduct," the marchioness was saying, "but you must accept its consequences, Count. I tell you, therefore, that no man in the world, save her husband, shall have the right to boast that he embraced my daughter in the presence of two hundred people—no, not even if it were to save her from certain death. Hence the rest is understood, and notwithstanding that your coat of arms is very inferior to mine in its number of quarterings, my daughter can accept no other suitor than yourself, provided always that you are in a position to marry her."

"Dear marchioness, I have at length attained my majority. I am of age, and at liberty therefore to marry without my parents' consent. It is not even necessary for me to consult anyone in the matter. I am sure of my mother's property, anyway; for that was left to me unconditionally, and it is enough for us."

At this stage of the proceedings I deem further details useless. Suffice it to say that the swimming school was broken up, and the betrothed returned to Milan, where, before the end of July, the banns were published.

So I close, with best wishes to the swimming-master and his bride.

To prevent unnecessary labour, and consequent disappointment, to any readers of this paper, who in the past have forwarded original stories for insertion, we would take this opportunity of saying that our arrangements for the provision of matter for "Short Stories" are complete for some time to come.

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His Troublesome Charge.

DAR KEWOOD was the grandest old country seat—its owner, Philip Darke, called it farm—in the whole world.

It stretched out as far as the eye could reach, in verdant meadows, and gentle productive hills, picturesque valleys, and heavily-timbered levels.

Through the most secluded part of the timber a deep trout stream meandered aimlessly between banks fringed with ferns and flowers for a couple of miles, then lost its identity in the restless, cliff-girt ocean beyond.

The well-appointed stables, all neatly painted red and white, and containing some of the best horseflesh in the country, even Phil Darke's enemies admitted, were well separated from the dwellings by orchards of peach and pear, apple and cherry, and plenteous patches of fruit-bushes.

For the dwellings themselves—they were all commodiously built, painted cool, clear white, even cooler looking by contrast with the green shutters; they were well surrounded by balconies and verandahs upon which all the windows opened, after the southern style.

Standing in one of these open door-windows now—one lying between the softly-carpeted and richly appointed drawing-room and the low verandah surrounding it—stood a stylish woman of thirty or so, with a beautiful but rather selfish-looking dark face.

She wore a magnificent *negligé* of creamy silk and lace; many diamonds and rubies flashed upon her white hands, but there was a look of intolerance in her haughty eyes.

Those eyes were following an unconscious pair carelessly wending their way homewards across the spring-kissed fields—only a girl and a dog. The former tall and slight, the latter a great, handsome shaggy collie.

They were on very good terms with each other, for occasionally the girl would bend down, and the dog would bound up, then there would be a clear, ringing laugh, a thrill of whistles, and a series of joyous barks.

Mrs. Devereaux frowned impatiently while they drew nearer and became merrier in their gambols.

She was wondering if this girl might not interfere with the financial future of her own children—a boy of twelve and a girl of eight—whose voices came buoyantly up from the stables, where their Shetland ponies were installed.

Mrs. Devereaux was the widowed sister of Philip Darke. Early in life she had married a wealthy broker, and ever since her life had been spent in a whirl of social fashions and worldly ambitions, until now the fortune her husband had left was well nigh exhausted.

Had it not been for their wealthy and lavishly generous bachelor uncle, she would have felt very much concerned over her children's future.

Even as it was, she did sometimes. What if he should ever marry? He was not beyond the possibility of it, surely, at forty-four? Still, she hadn't much fear of that.

Phil had always been such an odd fellow, and one love affair early in life had ended disastrously; then he swore he would never have another, and he never had thus far, although it was not the fault of his female acquaintances.

What, though, if he should leave his fortune, or most of it, or Darkewood, to this wild young thing whose guardian he had been ever since she was a tiny mite of three or four?

For all his lazy philosophy, he had a warm, generous heart. He might have grown to love this girl through association; after all, she was the daughter of his hapless early love—the orphaned child of the woman for whose sake he had turned from all other women in disdain.

From her death-bed she had sent her child to Philip Darke, charging him to care for her as if she had been his own.

The selfishness of her charge had always been a theme for scorn on Mrs. Devereaux's part; but Philip had accepted it—whether with pleasure or pain, no one ever knew. For all his indifferent exterior, he was a man of iron will, and no one should ever again see him moved like a girl.

He sauntered lazily into the cool, tree-shaded drawing-room, even while the frown still rested upon his handsome worldly sister's brow

She did not hear him on the deep pile of the carpet until he reached her side and threw one arm round her waist.

Then she gave vent to a little shocked exclamation, not at this act, but at the act of the girl she was keenly watching.

"Gracious! She has vaulted the fence almost without an effort."

Philip smiled under his big brown moustache, and a lazy amusement crept into his dark eyes.

"Nest? Oh, she's an athlete," he responded, watching the slight dark figure, coming whistling up the lane. "She can send her mare, Duchess of Leinster, over any fence or ditch that I can take with Prince Madblood, I assure you. Not only that, but she's the captain of a ladies' boat club and the tennis club."

Mrs. Devereaux looked at him in dumb horror a moment. Then:

"And you look on smiling at all this—nay, talk as if you admired her for it!" she exclaimed at last. "You have brought her up like a great over-grown tom-boy, instead of a lady-like, intelligent girl, fitted for some use in the world. She ought to be going to school instead of jumping ditches with horses and leaping fences with dogs like a stable-boy."

A quick dark flush mounted to Philip's broad, high brow.

"But she does go to school," he said, resentfully, "in the village—a very good school; but there isn't any now—it's holiday time."

Mrs. Devereaux shrugged her shoulders.

"A village school—bah! She should be going away to some finishing school, some academy, where she could learn to behave herself decently and earn her livelihood. She has no fortune, I believe—her mother simply left her a name. You should certainly educate her to earn her own living, to be independent of your charity in her womanhood at least, Philip.

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She is almost a woman—seventeen. Why, I was married t that age!"

The amusement in his eyes had fled, giving place to a thoughtful, troubled look.

Was he wronging Ernestine Villard by letting her receive an education and be happy in her own way?

Would she blame him, wish to be independent of him, in her womanhood?

It shocked and pained him to think that womanhood was so near at hand, that other girls married often at her present age.

He had enjoyed the tomboyism and daring and frank carelessness of her girlhood quite as much as she had—he had been her tutor in many an athletic feat.

And he had found her such a gay, glad, apt pupil, such an ever-interesting companion.

He had taught her many things that would have shocked his haughty sister, more even than her expert riding and fence leaping—among them to shoot on the wing with a pretty little rifle he had given her, or a revolver, and to play cards many an evening—just for fun—and skilfully enough to many a time relieve him of pocket-money.

Yes, he saw it now; this was wrong, all wrong.

Ernestine would soon be a woman, and, though he never meant that she should earn her own living, on any account, she would have to go out into the world and mingle with other women.

If she felt lost and out of place among them; if she could not equal them in refinement, knowledge, accomplishments, would she not blame her guardian, and justly?

The thought haunted him all day and unpleasantly.

When Nest asked him to join her in a ride to the beach, he answered her shortly, so shortly that she looked at him in amazement.

Had she displeased him? How? Well, she couldn't go riding now; and tears of pain and resentment blinded her eyes while she hunted up fishing-tackle, took the eager collie into the secluded May woods, where dwelt the timid trout under shadow of tangled undergrowth.

Mrs. Devereaux had been at Darkewood but two days when she became so terribly bored with loneliness, that she spoke to Philip about asking some people down from town.

"Oh, Phil! Phil! do you want to get rid of me?"

He carelessly assured her that she was welcome to ask whoever she wanted whenever she wanted them; but there was no one for whose coming he especially cared; he had been a hermit so long, etc.

So she asked a number of society people—people supposed to be wealthy, cultured, and all that was desirable; yet Philip Darke had never been so bored in all his life.

How languid and inane all the women were, painted, fashionable dolls, who were shocked at the hoidenism of Nest, because it required physical daring. Their daring was all moral, they flirted scandalously, married and single, and the men——

Bah! there was nothing manly about them. They were mere followers of the pretty butterflies of fashion; all, except one.

Gerald Graham was not a man to be despised by man or woman; there was something so frank, so noble, and manly about him that he was instead one to be admired even by his enemies, a handsome young fellow of thirty, with lots of brains, lots of daring, physical and moral, and plenty of money.

After a week at Darkewood, during which Mrs. Devereaux dressed and smiled ravishingly for his benefit, while he attentively studied her *bête noire*, the young hoiden, and while Philip went moodily about his farm feeling lost and onely, Gerald Graham became Nest's shadow.

A gay cavalier in all her rides, a companion in her walks, he boated with her, fished with her, talked with her until he fell madly in love with the unconsciously beautiful young tomboy, who interested him as no society woman had ever done or ever could.

Jealousy made Mrs. Devereaux very bitter of tongue. She never lost a chance to taunt Nest with her dependence, or scoff at her daring, and put misconstruction upon her most generous and disinterested act.

Nest was by nature quick of temper, hot, and passionate of blood. She controlled herself as long as she could—as long as self-respect and respect for Phil, dear old Phil, who had somehow grown so moody and out of place under his sister's taunts—would let her.

She sought her guardian, and found him in the library one day.

His head was bowed on his hands, and when he lifted his face, the eyes were haggard with painful thought.

Gerald Graham had just left him, and what had he said to bring that look upon the face she had learned to look upon as the noblest, and best, and kindest on earth?

She had come to speak of her own troubles—to tell him she must go away to earn her own living, that she could bear this dependence on him, with which she was so often taunted by his sister, no longer; but she forgot them in the sight of his.

"Oh, Guardy Phil, what is it?" she cried, going on her knees before him, her voice and face tremulous with pity. "Are you ill?"

"No, little one," he answered, with a slow, weary smile, "not physically; mentally, I don't know. The thought of parting with my *bon camarade* is hardly productive of pleasure. Ernestine"—the smile vanished, his voice became sterner—"perhaps you know, but he said you didn't! Gerald Graham has just asked my consent to woo you—as his wife, child. What shall I say to him?"

Her face flushed, then blanched, and flushed again.

"Tell him?" she repeated; then bitterly, "Tell him that I thank him for the honour he would confer upon me, but——Oh, Phil! Phil!"—and she shrunk shivering to the floor and burst into a storm of sobs, her face pressed to her palms—"do you want to get rid of me? You are cruel too."

A moment he looked at her in silence, then a slow, almost fearful light crept into his eyes.

He touched the bowed head with a reverence and devotion he had never given to any cultured or queenly dame of fashion.

"Nest," he said softly, gently drawing her to his breast, "I've been learning my own heart while surrounded by all these people for the last five or six weeks. I've seen you falling in love with young Graham"—she started, but he went on—"and in my mind I've forced myself to see my life as it must be without you, sweet. You know the dead old trunk of a tree on the edge of the woods? I know my life would be like that without the beautiful verdure of your dear presence round it."

"But I don't love Gerald Graham, except as a friend, a good noble man, and a good rider, a good shot," she protested.

And the haggard eyes broke into light of wonder and incredulity.

Then—well, suffice it to say that less than a month later his troublesome charge became Philip Darke's beloved wife, his *bon camarade* for life.

It was a hard hit for Graham, but he had never been encouraged by Nest, who had unconsciously lost her heart to her guardian long before.

The Duchess of Leinster still keeps pace with Prince Madblood, and the ditches are as deep, and the fences as steep as ever, and Ernestine's husband more her lover than he was of yore; and the bright-eyed, impulsive, dashing, and lovable little lady of Darkewood does not regret it.

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THE MAN MY SISTER MARRIED.

CHAPTER XIII.

ABOUT the tiny thing, and yellow from being long laid away, a faint odour of violets lingered; in one corner was the embroidered "L"—my own work.

"Will you not tell me just how it all happened?" he asked tenderly. "Let me help you as I did before. Oh, Letty, do I not deserve your confidence?"

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot!" I moaned.

"I am cruel to ask it," he said quickly; "you are so pale and troubled now. Get up from the floor, you poor child, and let me take you home. I ordered the horses a half-hour ago."

"I hate to tell you all," I said steadily, "because it makes me out a sly and spying thing; but my silly pride about that dies at this moment. *I won't* get off the floor, for a mean person like me ought to grovel. I want to tell somebody, for, truly, I know more than I can bear. I think, sometimes, I shall go crazy. I cannot sleep any more. If I find out other secrets of dead people I shall ask to be shut up in an asylum, for fear I shall take to killing, too. If I could give someone my ghosts I should be happy; and, you know, when you tell a thing that haunts you it often goes away. But why should I give you my horrors?"

"Because I have lived so long among them that they don't worry me," he said drearily.

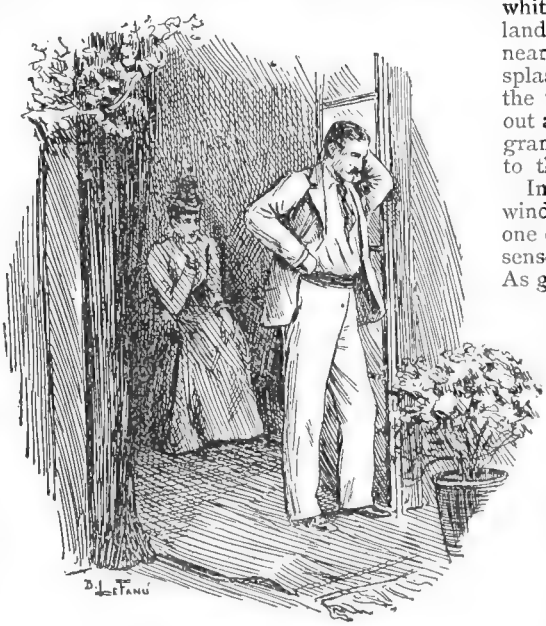
"If I thought you would never mention it to me, and treat me as a good girl, not a prying, ungrateful demon, if only for a little while—a month, perhaps—I could bear to tell all."

"A month is a short time," he smiled; "I can promise that."

Then I told him all, even why I went there. Once or twice he moved uneasily and sighed, but he did not say a word.

"Please do not crouch on the floor any more," he said, when I had finished; "if there is anyone to do that, I should."

I got up on my feet and took his hand. "Never think any more, Mr. Scott, I shudder when you are near me," I said, and, before I knew what I was doing, I put his hand to my lips. He turned hastily and went to the window. I saw that his face was ghastly pale, his eyes misty with tears. We had talked so long it was quite dark outside, and the fragrance of the flowers, damp and sweet, swept across our faces.



He turned hastily and went to the window.

"Sometime," he said slowly, "Margaret shall tell you all that story, after the probation."

I was glad that I had not said a word of Yara or those letters, only of the hotel and what I saw there.

"I hate it all," I said miserably.

"Do any of us think of it without agony?" he cried bitterly, then he suddenly checked himself. "Go brush your pretty curls, Letty, and have dinner with me. It is too late for yours at home. Let me try for that month of probation to make you see a John Scott other than the ruffian you think. You are hurt and sad over this affair with the Italian. You will be lonely without your lessons. Let me see if I cannot make your life brighter. My love for your sister Katherine makes you dear to me."

"If you speak of her I shall never like you," I cried. "Indeed, I cannot bear it."

"I will never speak of her, then, to you," he said, looking at me searchingly; "and yet, about that—her—you are not like yourself. I never can read you, Letty."

Strange as it may seem, his friendship, after that, took all my troubles, even my ghosts, away. I think it was because I had never had such a friend before. He came every day to take Aunt Marg and me driving or to sail in his yacht. He brought me books, and taught me to love the authors he cared for most. He praised my singing, and I found myself satisfied with my listeners as never before.

Without reading a line, I hid those two hateful letters and soon forgot I had them. I noticed I grew particular about my gowns and dissatisfied with my looks. I avoided Justina, and heard with delight that Dean Gregory had gone away, and Yara had limped across the beach a week after my new friendship began. I was not very strong that month, and that may be the reason I was so easy to lead and so grateful for kindness and courtesy.

One night in that month, July, there came a terrible storm; the wind roared across the Gulf; the sea raged in fury, thundering along the sand, and the flying spray stretched out great white arms to the shivering homes on the land, those houses on stilts, forlornly set near the beach. Often the water splashed against my window, and I heard the waves beneath the house rush in and out and break against the porch, and all grandfather's rose-bushes were covered to their tops in water, and many died.

In the morning, sullen and grey, the wind still howled and the sea roared, and one could not hear another sound! Every sense was stunned by nature's warfare. As grandfather and I were trying to bring order out of the chaos of his rose-bushes, John rode by and stopped to tell me that he was going fifteen miles along the beach to see after some of his property which he thought the storm might have injured.

How handsome he looked, on his big black horse! My mind went back to Justina's story. He had held me, a tiny baby, close to his heart and rode with me long weary miles. Did I cry and wail as babies do in such misery as mine? I must have done so, but I knew he was not impatient or cross. I fancied the tender pity in his beautiful eyes as he bent over me—the helpless sigh from his lips. At any rate, he had held me to his heart then, if he never would again.

"Letty, you have been staring straight at me for five minutes," he said uncomfortably, "and you have not said a word." I turned rosy red and began playing with the tassels on a very pretty blue gown I had made myself and put on, knowing that he would ride down some time during the day.

"I was thinking," I stammered. "Is it not dangerous to ride on the beach now?"

"You, a little sea-loving maid, a mariner's grandchild, to ask! You had better go finish your sleep, and quit dreaming in daylight. Did you know that I came down and tried to reason with that obstinate barnacle, your grandfather, who, as usual, flung his thirty years' experience here in my face?"

"You were worried about the sea, too," I said triumphantly, and watched him ride away. All that day I felt queer and uncanny. The wind still raged and the sea grew more threatening. I thought of the ships far out, and the sailors. I fancied the green, curling surf, peopled with poor drowned men, and how in far, sandy tide-inlets, they would lie unburied, lost to all who loved them. What an army they are too, followed with more miserable shadows of wrecked

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homes and hearts than all who went to wars, watched out of sight and recorded in a country's annals.

At last, forgetting all but my strange presentiments, I set out for Justina's cottage to get her to read the cards. There is no truth in it, I thought, as I went along, "but it is a comfort to know the red ones turn up and mean good fortunes. If spades should run, I don't think I could stand it."

When I reached her cottage, I found it locked: every window and the two doors. Even when she goes away she never fastens her door. Dear me, there is nothing in her house to tempt even a fellow-Mexican! I fancied I heard a faint cry when I tried the front door a second time, but the storm made such a noise, I might have been mistaken.

But as I stood there the queer feeling came back, and an unconquerable impulse to go into that house. I am not a coward—anyone can see that—so I went round to the back and forced a window. Do you know, I felt that Justina needed me, and yet they say she has no unusual powers, and is only a fraud!

The shambling creature came into my view.

The house was black and still, the curtains down; no one in the kitchen; in the front room I stumbled over something on the floor that sent me off my feet, shuddering with fear and horror. Trembling, and avoiding that thing, I went to the matchbox. I lit a candle. There, beside the table, sat Justina, bound hand and foot, and gagged—a horrible sight, with her black, swollen face and starting eyes. I set her free, cutting the tight cords that had scarred her flesh; then I dashed water in her face.

"Yara," she gasped, "he is gone to kill the man, Chica love."

To kill the man I loved! A great sob rose in my throat. "Justina," I cried, "listen—keep your senses. Be calm. Tell me, when did he start? Yara, when did he come?"

"This afternoon, he sit here and drink. I guess his dark thoughts. I watch him, and creep out—creep ever so softly to my Chica. I knew he meant to kill; but he caught me, dragged me here, left me this way. Oh, I have called my baby for hours; she came, my Chica! Oh, I lied about the trance! I did not do that. It was a fraud. The Colonel told him to tell you all about your sister. He hates the man you love. He wanted you to stab his heart. I am a wicked woman. You will have no masses said for Justina. Oh, say you will, Chica! let me die in peace—in peace." She raised herself from her seat, and clung convulsively to my knees.

Justina, bound hand and foot, and gagged.

"I will," I said, freeing myself, and then I went toward the door. "If that good man is killed, Justina, my heart will break. What can I do?"

"Yara went along the beach. He is lame," she gasped; "you are so quick, run along, get ahead, and warn Mr. Scott. Oh, Chica, have masses said for my soul, my wicked soul!"

I drew my cloak about me and started across the sand; then up to the street, where I ran like a mad woman. The fog, wet and grey, stung my face, as the wind hurled it along laden with sand, and the spray, as it dashed over the street, wet me and clung to me with dripping clots of foam. I saw faces at the windows as I passed; they must have wondered what it was, a spectre or a woman.

At last, a speck in the grey distance, I saw a limping figure, and I knew I was in time. Then, when I was far ahead, I turned down to the beach, for night was coming on and I might miss John in the darkness. I crouched behind a low sand-hill, where I might watch either way, and, as I waited the shambling creature came into my view, pushing steadily on to seek his prey. I thought he saw me, and, mad with fear, I ran back among the hills. I crept forward after that, starting at every water-rotted log. I thought every moment I might fall over him, lying hid and waiting.

Just where a deep creek crept in across the sand to the shore I saw a black object, and it moved. That was he, waiting there; he dared not run the risk of death in that deep inlet with its rushing tide, nor to wet the revolver he carried for his work. I went back a little way; the water ran so far into the land I dared not go to the end to cross. I must be near the assassin to do any good. I stepped into the water, with a little shiver of dread. I dared not think what a terrible current there was rushing back to the beach after each big wave, nor what frightful sea-monster might have been hurled in by a breaker, nor of that watching, hideous thing so near.

When the water reached my waist it lifted me off my feet, clinging to my wet garments like an octopus, giant-armed, reaching for its prey. I struggled ahead, but the force drew me to the wild sea where, at the mouth of the creek, great breakers fought a terrible battle with the out-going waves

To this maelstrom I floated helpless.

"I will reach land," I panted; "the sea shall not drown me. They say that never a Lombard lies there. They always died ashore, and they were all seafaring folks too. I, the last of the line, I will not drown."

Then as my strength failed, and I was near giving up the cruel struggle, a big wave seized me, whirled me about, and tossed me, light as thistle, down upon the sand. Staggering under my water-weighed garments, I ran ahead into the darkness, in the path I knew he must come. Hark, above the storm I heard the thud of a

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"Letty!" he cried, and forced the horse up beside me.

horse's hoofs on the hard sand. He would ride me down, and go on unheeding.

"John," I cried, and the wind took up my cry, and carried it far from me with mocking delight. A great, dripping, panting thing came upon me, then swerved, as I stood there helpless.

"John," I called, "will you not hear? There must be some mercy in heaven!"

"Letty!" he cried, and forced the horse up beside me. "Letty! here! and I—I thought a dead woman called me."

"When I have risked my life to save you," I sobbed, "you thrust her memory between us."

He leaped from his horse and caught me in his arms. "Risked your life to save me, my darling, my best beloved!" and it did not seem his voice at all with all that fire in it. "My darling!" I heard him say that, and to a living woman, not a dead one. He flung off my dripping cape and wrapped his coat about me, while I told him in a few gasping words of that dreadful creature waiting there.

"It would have been kinder to let me die," he said; "shame on me for that speech. Oh, I am grateful to you, but," with his old laugh, "what shall I do with you? Poor little shivering thing. You will get your death. I don't know a house near here."

"Take me home, John, back across the land, not near that —that awful thing."

"But how? Dare you ride behind me? Don can carry two. He is wise and gentle, though he looks so fierce. Don, will you carry the brave little maid who saved your master's worthless life?"

He mounted the great plunging creature, then reached down his hands to me, the rein across his arm. How easily he lifted me clear from the ground, and calmed the frightened horse. I clung to him as the sea swept up against us and the wind roared in our faces. I could hold him there in the darkness and feel that I loved him. I wished I might never see the morrow, only to die that night, and never wake to know he did not care for me.

At last we turned again to the beach, and there, ahead, shone the light from our little cottage, a yellow gleam in the night; never so dear, so welcome to me before, for I felt my senses leaving me, and I wanted him to think me brave and strong. I felt that he lifted me down, and held me to his heart.

"I think I can walk," I faltered.

"I carried you years before, when you were a tiny baby. That gives me the right now, little heroine."

And then I did not know any more.

CHAPTER XIV.

I REMEMBER someone laid me on my bed, and Aunt Marg and Liz wept over me; then a delicious feeling of warmth and comfort came upon me; yet I seemed frozen to my heart; afterwards a sharp pain like the stab from a knife came in my breast, and I cried out in agony. Soon I could not think rationally, the room was whirling round, and I could see nothing distinctly. Once I recognised Aunt Marg, and asked her if someone had gone to Justina's, and she answered that John had.

"He never forgets to do a kindess," I cried. Then I forgot again, and seemed out on the sea-swept beach, facing the storm. It was very dark, and out of the shadows great queer things came and gibed at me, and long arms stretched themselves out to drag me into some horror I could not fathom. Many times Antonio came creeping by the bed, his wild eyes glittering, a long keen knife in his hand. Then Captain Dana, misty and pale, appeared and poured a white powder into wine. I screamed, "Do the dead come back to do murder, to be revenged on the living?"

Sometimes I was running along the sand, trying to overtake the shambling figure, but he was always just ahead. I could see him, but never gain on him; he would turn and leer at me, and wave his hand mockingly. Often I went to that lonely hut, and there sat Justina, with staring eyes and purple face, and she would curse me and say, "Chica, this is your work. You sent Yara here, and he has killed me."

Oh, those frightful dreams of the sea, when I struggled in the water, and great sea monsters came and dragged me down; wound slimy clutching arms about me and held me fast. They said afterwards I struggled terribly then, and only John could hold me.

One day, however, the weight seemed lifted off my chest, and my head was clear, but I was too weak to lift my hand.

"Is she better?" said John's voice; and Aunt Marg, who must have been sitting by me, rose and answered there was hope. He came to me, lifted my hand in his warm palm, and held it.

"John," said Aunt Marg—and how far away her voice sounded!—"I think that you love our little Violet."

"Margaret," he cried brokenly, "don't talk to me of love. If she were dearer to me than my life I would never tell her so. It would be a crime to link her fate with mine after my past. No good could come of such a union. My best love was given to Katherine—is hers yet; I would not cheat this child with a mockery of affection. Some day she will meet someone near her age, and be happy with him. She is my sister, and I will be her brother my life long."

Oh, how I struggled! At last my heavy lids opened, and the words came. "Only a little while, John; if you do not love me, I shall die."

I said I would not live, but I did. I came back to health by slow steps—long days of weakness, then a greed for food, and a fierce distaste for my bed and the narrow confines of my room. How beautiful those autumn days were to me! for I had been shut up nearly two months. When I could go downstairs, how good they all were! John sent flowers daily, and my room was a garden.

I could lie on a sofa and look on the blue sea, the flying clouds, the tiny white sails in the distance, and be glad of just living. After all, the sunlight and free air are better than cold unknown death, our land dearer than the unexplored country. I was very penitent with Justina, but she, good soul, never remembered my unkindness. She would come and kiss my hand and cry over me.

"The angels did not get Chica," she would say; "old Justina's prayers were heard by the blessed saints!" She seemed as if she had entered into a compact with the blessed saints to outwit the angels and to rejoice in it. I was too weak to try to tease her. I only said, "I thought the angels were not particularly anxious to have me I have not been a shining light on earth."

Aunt Marg was very sweet and good during the days of my convalescence. She even tried to gather the gossip of the neighbourhood that she might entertain me. She made me the prettiest blue wrapper, and used to brush my hair, cut

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short now, and curling in little rings all over my head, and tell me I was better looking than ever.

"As if I cared," I said, mournfully one day, when she was sitting beside me; and indeed I hardly ever looked in the glass now. "You never mentioned that Mexican, Aunt Marg, in your news; where is he?"

"He was drowned, dear. He must have waited by the creek until very late, and not knowing the beach, wandered too close to the sea. They found him on the sand when the waves went down; no one identified him, and he was buried among the unknown dead."

"I am glad he died thus," I said; "I am so weary of other —other deaths," I finished evasively; then I thought of her goodness, and how my speech must have hurt her. "Aunt Marg," I cried, penitently, "if you had ever showed you cared so much for me, how I should have loved you! But you always held me at arm's length."

"I have been afraid," she stammered, "of my own unworthiness of innocent love, and of attaching myself to one who might hurt me cruelly. My life has made me bitter, Letty."

I looked at her sweet face framed in its snowy hair. "You could not be bitter if you tried, Aunt Marg; tell me, was I very crazy when I was ill."

"You talked most of the time very wildly."

"Of what?"

"Sea-monsters, wicked men, your Mexican protegé, and other things," she answered.

"Did I scream and fight them?"

"Sometimes."

"Who held me?"

"John."

"Me! In my nightgown!" I said wickedly. "No wonder you blush!" But I did not, I had not the grace to. "I should think that his dear Katherine's memory would have made taking care of me very trying to him."

"Katherine was your sister, dear."

"Only half, I'm glad to say," I answered, thumping my pillow. "Now, Liz said I told everything when I was out of my head, and as I don't know all of that story, and John said you should tell me, you ought to, straight away; and before you begin, I assure you I know a great deal about Katherine, and I am very sorry she was any relation of mine."

"I have sometimes thought," said Aunt Marg, folding her thin white hands and looking out on the sea, "that the possession of such beauty as Katherine had makes a woman heartless. She is so surrounded by flattery all her life, she fails to gain any of the finer attributes of womanly goodness forced on plainer women or born in them.

"It was so with your father, Paul Lombard. He could win hearts so easily, he cared little for them afterward. When he came to San Antonio, where I lived with my invalid father and my sister Mary, I hated him. It's odd to say that to you, dear, but I must tell my story in my own way. Yet he won my father, he was so handsome, so reckless and merry, and my sister grew to love him; and though I strove with all my might to prevent it, they were married at my father's death-bed. Mary was so used to me—she always leaned on a stronger will—I had not the heart to leave her, and I went to Galveston with her and her husband. I will say of Paul that he forgave the past and was always kind to me.

"Katherine was about fifteen then, but marvellously matured in mind and body. Girls of southern blood become women so early. She was very wild and headstrong, and quarrelled with your grandfather all the time. I loved her in a short time, she was so brilliant and merry, and I was a quiet, sober sort of a girl. I never had any childhood. She was engaged to Dean Gregory then, and I used to carry notes for them, and wait on Katherine like a slave. Dean had to be secret in his courtship, for his mother did not like Katherine, and would never hear of her marrying her son. Her husband was mining in Mexico most of the time, and we thought Dean went there to be with him; afterward I knew differently.

"They always thought Doctor Scott would leave Dean some of his property; but just before the Doctor died there was a story about Dean and a quadroon girl, and the doctor, being a northern man, looked on such things with horror, so Dean was left out of the will. Dean always blamed John, but John never even knew about it. When Katherine found Dean would have no money she grew cold to him, though I think she cared a great deal for him; and one day she married John Scott, and I did not even know a thing about it, when she and I were such friends. He was madly in love with her.

"When rumours of the war came, John made up his mind to go to Mexico. Texas was in a fever, every man against his neighbour, and John had promised his father on his death-bed never to fight against the north. Mrs. Scott was a Southerner, and that tied John's hands from going into the Federal Army. He could not fight against his own kin, he was so young. In the midst of such imposing forces, he did the wisest thing; he left the country.

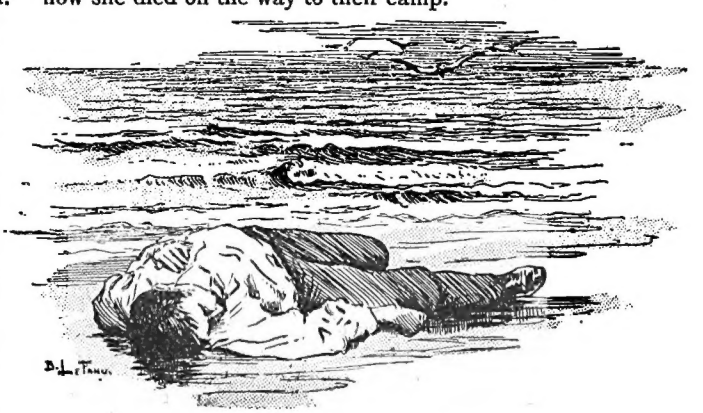
"Doctor Scott owned a great deal of property in Mexico, and John went there. When your father heard of his going, he wanted to join the party, and that led to others going. You know the rest; all that Yara told you was true. Justina confessed everything when you were ill. From what I know now, I am sure Katherine wrote to Dean after her marriage. She still cared for him, and she never loved John. When she made that wicked plan for Dean to take her away, she never dreamed of the terrible results. No woman could be so wicked, so utterly heartless.

"That day the trouble came, we were camped by a little stream bordered by mesquite trees; and as our horses were footsore we made quite a stay. We saw some Mexicans along our route, but no Indians, so we were at ease about danger; afterwards I knew those men belonged to Xarras' band. Even some of our servants were his men, and they all ran away when they were most needed.

"I wonder sometimes why I, of all the others, was saved. It was so curious, too; for all the reason I went to walk that day was because I was angry at the journey, at Katherine's rudeness to me, at my sister Mary's husband for taking her and her young baby on such a fool's errand. I remember I put you to sleep and made Mary comfortable—she was never strong, and the long journey wearied her sadly—and then I went away from the camp to fight my battle alone.

"I was calmer when I turned back; resolved, no matter what hardships came, to be true to Mary and stay by her; when my thoughts were rudely broken by the sound of shots, and then women's cries—such terrible ones! I crept close to the camp, and there, crossing the stream, were eight men on horseback rudely disguised as Indians. I knew them, everyone. I never forget faces, and all those men I had spoken with on our way; two of our servants were among them.

"Your father ran out at the first shot. It was meant to alarm the watcher. Antonio, the man you pitied, killed your father as he ran out of his tent, and, as he fell forward on his face, turned and shot him again in the back. Mary, with you, a three months' old baby, in her arms, ran to her husband, and one man seized her, flung you on the ground, and thrust her into a waggon. Mercifully she had fainted. I know now she died on the way to their camp.



They found him on the sand when the waves went down.

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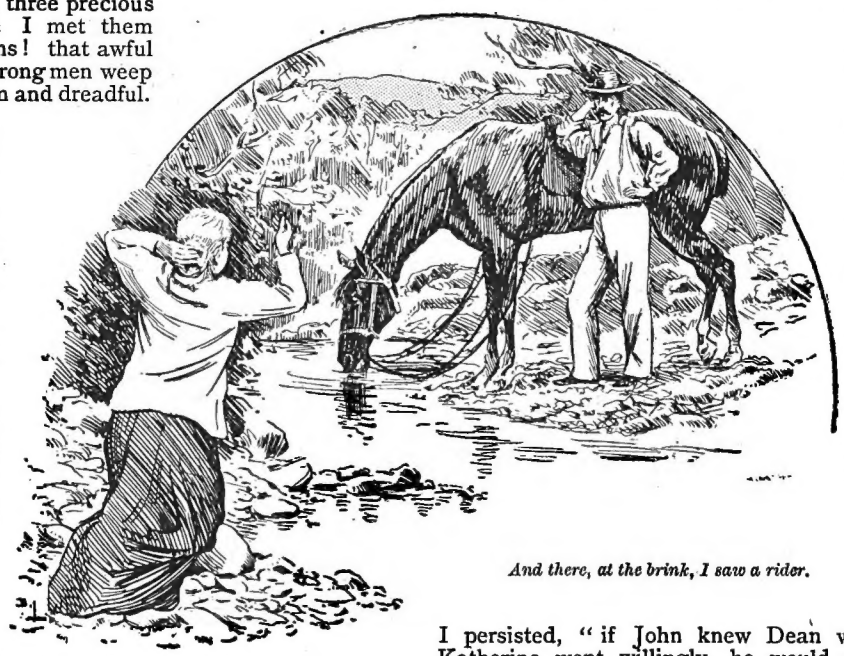
"I saw Katherine mount a horse, not one look of pity on her beautiful face; and then she and Xarras rode ahead, while the rest of the women, bound and gagged, were loaded into a waggon to which four of our horses were harnessed, and then they all crossed the river, disappearing at a gallop. When I think of that scene—the brutality of those men to helpless women, the horrors afterward—I could almost wish I might give them the poisoned cup myself.

"You may have judged Captain Dana harshly, but his wife and daughter were there, and he never saw them again. I have been blamed for not coming forward; called a coward; accused of collusion with Katherine; of every cruel thing, by those men in their agony. They know now, when my life has been one long martyrdom, that I was innocent of wrong. I dared not move, and then I thought of you, helpless and so dear to me. If a wild animal came, and there were many of them in that country, what a horrible fate would come to you! It might be hours before the men came back. I could save you, and I did.

"When the Mexicans had disappeared across the plain in a cloud of dust, I crept from my hiding place, seized you, and with the strength of desperation ran in the direction our men had gone.

"It was three hours, three precious hours to them, before I met them returning. Oh, heavens! that awful scene! I never saw strong men weep before, nor look so stern and dreadful. As I finished my story, one young man, not married a month, bared his arm and cut a great cross in the quivering flesh; holding up his dripping knife, he made all those men swear a fearful oath of extermination, and it was carried out. He never lived for his vengeance, but died in a madhouse, after a year of hopeless search; but one man hunted every assassin down, one man's courage and patience never failed.



And there, at the brink, I saw a rider.

"They rode on at a gallop, the dogs after them, and I toiled back to the camp with you. All that terrible night you wept and wailed, and I could do nothing for you. I was alone in that dreary place, where only a dead man lay face downward as he fell; for there was none to care for the dead, when the living were in such need. Alone in that desert land, the trees rustled like ghostly assassins, the very moonlight shadows drove me mad, with fear of creeping men returning to make their work more sure, to kill the witness of it all.

"In the grey dawn, the dogs, limping and weary, came back. and your father's Gordon setter lay down by him, and once in a while would rise and howl, a dreary dreadful cry that quivered along the empty distance, bringing ghastly echoes back to mock us. I knew my brain was giving way. I could not think. I only cried: 'Margaret, the child will die if you do not keep calm, if you have not reason.'

"I went to the river, bathed my face, and flung handfuls of water over my burning forehead. And there, at the brink, I saw a rider, and I had no strength to fly, even if he were an enemy. Oh, heavens! I did not know him at first. That awful mad-eyed, haggard face; the bloodless lips; the terrible look! His tired steed drank greedily at the stream, and then the rider's dazed eyes saw me.

"'John, I am not a ghost,' I cried; 'why do you look at me so, as if you saw some horror? I am Margaret.'

"Then he answered with a groan of agony, 'Margaret, your hair is as white as snow.'"

"Aunt Marg," I sobbed, "tell me no more. Tell me no more. Oh, my miserable life! My treachery to you! I cannot, cannot bear it. I, too, could kill. There was justice in those murders. And think of my treatment to you, my coldness, and my want of gratitude! Oh, can you ever forget and forgive?"

"My dear, I love you; I always did, even when I feared you might be like her, and then I dared not care for you." She took my head upon her breast, tenderly smoothing my burning face. "It has been too much for you, my dear, but this is the end. Ah, that I could have told you years before, but I had to keep my oath of silence. John came back to take me to San Antonio, and on the way we met Justina, and through her you lived.

"For a year I was crazy, in an asylum, dear, and you can understand what a scene that was, to turn a strong-headed, clear-brained woman as I was into a maniac. When I recovered I learned that the search had been unsuccessful, though John had spent thousands and hired an army of men in the pursuit. Then, when they reproached him, as men will at such times, for taking them to such a spot, he swore to devote his life to that pursuit and bring every Mexican to justice, and he kept his oath.

"Yara told those men at first of Katherine's complicity, but John was never informed. They feared he might cease his ardour or turn his hatred only to one man, and forsake their cause. No Mexican told that Xarras was Dean Gregory, for they were faithful to him and must have loved him. All those poor women found happy release in death, and we have learned their sufferings were short. Two took their own lives. I cannot speak any more, Letty; it is too dreadful."

"But Aunt Marg," I persisted, "if John knew Dean was Xarras, and that Katherine went willingly, he would still keep his oath to murder."

"I fear he would."

I lifted my face and kissed her, a long silent kiss.

Two hours afterwards grandfather came in. I had been thinking all that time how to escape from the tangled path and be out in the sunlight again.

"I want you to go to Dean Gregory, grandfather—he is here—and tell him I must see him."

"It's hard to be led by a third generation," he grumbled, "but 'wisdom from babes,' I s'pose; but I tell ye frankly, Letty, I hate him."

"Not more than I do," I answered; and that very evening Liz, looking cross and worried, came to tell me Dean Gregory was at the door, waiting to see me.

(To be continued next week.)

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LADS AND LASSES AT SCHOOL.

WHEN I was a lad at school. How long ago is that? Men whose beards are getting full of the sort of frost that does not thaw in the spring may love to gossip about the past, but they do not love to *think* of it *when alone.* Oh, the infinite pathos, penitence and heartbreak of that appealing line in Cardinal Newman's "Lead, Kindly Light,"—"*Remember not past years.*" Like spilled water, memory spreads unpleasantly when let go.

What I want to recall now is whether my school-days were my happiest, healthiest days. The facts show clear through the mists, and the answer is, No. The writer came of a sound stock, and was well cared for, yet his greatest pains and most frequent and dangerous illnesses were when he was a lad at school. I do not affirm this to be the rule with boys, but it was so, without especial reason, with me.

And here is another man who says: "All my life, even as a lad at school, I suffered from illness. I had dizziness, violent headaches, nausea, and saw spots floating before my eyes. Sometimes I vomited a greenish-yellow fatty matter, and again was qualmish and sick without vomiting. While in my teens and up to manhood I had bilious attacks *every week*, more or less severe. At times I felt fairly well, and then would be taken with cold shivers, and obliged to go to bed. During each attack my appetite left me, and I could touch no food whatever. Often would I come home from my work and sit down to my dinner without taking a mouthful.

"As time went on, although I was muscularly stronger, I felt a great strain on my nervous system, oppression and soreness in the head, and pain and heat behind the eyes. I felt tired and low-spirited, and got but little rest at night."

The writer's next sentence should stand by itself, like a monument. [The printer will please set it in italics.]

"*In this way I continued better and worse for over thirty-four years, and what I suffered none can imagine.*"

Let the reader try to round up that statement in his mind and see how large a fact it is, and what a lesson it teaches.

The witness proceeds: "I underwent every sort of medical treatment and took every medicine that I heard of, but they all left me in a short time as bad as ever.

"In May, 1890, a cousin of mine, Joseph Pyke, of York, West Australia, paid us a visit and mentioned what Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup had done for him when similarly afflicted in Australia. For a time I refused to try it, but being at my wits' end, I got a bottle from Mr. Frank May's store in Friar Street, and began using it. The contents of that single bottle relieved me, and I kept on with the medicine in faith and hope.

"Soon all my ailments vanished, and from that time to this I have been in good health, for which my thanks are due to Mother Seigel. Her remedy it is that has built me up, and made me stronger and more energetic than I have been for many, many years. Had I known of it earlier how much misery I might have avoided. I have worked for Messrs. Huntley and Palmer, Biscuit Manufacturers, Reading, for 39 years, and am still in their employ.—Yours truly, (Signed) Charles Pyke, 16, York Place, Chatham Street, Reading. October 25th, 1892."

What now are we to conclude from Mr. Pyke's experience? You see, of course, the meaning of it; that disease does its most damaging work among the young. The great majority of the human race die in childhood. The fittest, that is, the strongest, survive, just as Darwin says. We fellows with the frosty beards were able to fight through, and beat the diseases, the drugs, and the doctors. The weaklings fell and were buried. Next, parents don't watch the ills of their children with half an eye. Age and maturity are blind and selfish. It is the chicks that need care and protection. If our friend at Reading had met with Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup in boyhood—but, alas! it was not in existence then. It is to be had *now*, however, and if there are many pained and suffering children, who is to blame? Answer us that.

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	Noon.	p.m.
Margate .. About	12. 0 ..	12.30
Arriving.	p.m.	
Boulogne .. ,,	2.30 ..	3. 0
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